

**“HOW THE PEPE SCHULDE DON WORCHEPE AFORN THE
YIMAGE & NOUT TO THE YIMAGE.” VIEWS EXCHANGED
ON THE SEDUCTION OF DEVOTIONAL IMAGES IN *DIVES
AND PAUPER***

AGNÈS BLANDEAU
Université de Nantes

1. *Dives and Pauper* is an anonymous prose debate between two disputants about the Ten Commandments and their interpretation and relevance to everyday life in England around 1405-1410¹. The encounter of a rich layman with a poor religious preacher—two worlds that interact despite their crucial differences—mirrors the late-medieval link between scriptural culture and the profane text of the contemporary world which equally invites for interpretive effort. The prescriptive and advisory accents of the casuistic disputation between the rich and the poor sound authentic thanks to Pauper’s rhetorical techniques and the counterarguments employed by Dives, the recipient of his teaching. Dives’s keen, sometimes animated, contribution to the discussion proves that he does not play a passive role. It strikes as obvious when he condemns the Church’s love of ornamentation in the visual representations of saints, whose luxurious array presented as a token of their perfection aims to heighten devotion². The issue at stake in this paper is the attraction of pictures of the divine. The alluring brightness and enchanting hues that greet the parishioners’ eyes inside a church not only deceptively invite them to make offerings but also lead their mind and heart astray from the prototype of the worshipped painting. It is formulated as early as Table A which lists the various points that will be addressed in the section devoted to the First

1 *Dives and Pauper* is a prose exposition of the Decalogue presumably written between 1405 and 1410 by a Franciscan well-versed in scholastic rhetorics and theology, biblical and patristic material, as well as the classical and medieval *auctores*. It is edited by Priscilla Heath Barnum in two volumes with an additional one containing a detailed introduction, a helpful glossary, and a tremendous amount of explanatory notes in P. Heath Barnum, ed., *Dives and Pauper*, Vol.1, Part 1, Early English Text Society, 1976, Vol.I, Part 2, E.E.T.S., 1980, Vol.2, E.E.T.S., 2004.

2 *Dives and Pauper*, Vol.I, Part 1, Ch.10, 101, 1.46-56. “DIUES. Thu seydyt that be the feet [*of the saints*] been vnderstondyn mannys loue and his affecciuon, and therefore me thynkyght that the feet so shoyd in syluer shewyn that the loue and the affecciuon of meen of holy cherche is mechil seth in gold and syluyr and erthely coueytise, and sueche ryche clothynge of the ymage is but a tollyng of more offryng and a tokene to the lewyd peple qhere they shullyn offryn and qhat. For they han leuere a broche or a ryng of syluer or of gold than a peny or an halpeny thow the broche or the ryng be but of hesy prys. And comounly they shooyne noone ymagys ne clothyn hem so rychely but they ernyn ferst here shoon and here clothys but it be to tollyn folk to offryngge.”

Commandment: “How the peple schulde don worchepe afor the ymage & nout to the ymage”³. This article aims to tackle *Dives and Pauper* from the ecclesiastical perspective of the seduction of images in late-medieval England. As the noun *seduction* indicates, the praying man contemplating the image before him might be tempted to concentrate entirely on the object of his devotion and lose sight of the spiritual essence behind its concrete presence. The artistic depictions in churches of Christian symbolic figures and scenes, which will soon influence private devotion, may be misleading inasmuch as images draw the beholder’s thoughts away from a purely mental representation of divine matters into an emotional response to an attractive artefact that entices him to desert his allegiance or service to God⁴. Won over by the charm of “sueche ryche clothyngge of the ymage” (DP, I, 1, 101, l.49-50), the faithful runs the risk of erring in belief and conduct, especially when the figure is skilfully adorned for worship. In the discussion of the Fifth Commandment the painted images are compared to the seductive lies told by flatterers, a way to underscore the appeal they are suspected to have on those in contemplation of the divine⁵. Some light will be shed on various aspects of the controversy over the use of images in piety practices, as mirrored in this *summa*-like explication of the Decalogue. The respective views expressed by the rich man and the poor pastor of the souls reveal that the debate on the meanings and roles of seducing images in Christian devotion involved both clergy and laity at the time.

The issue of image worship

“But now clerkys censyn the ymagys, and othere preistys and clerkys and the lewyd peple also, and so, as me thynkyght, they doon ydolatrie.” (DP, I, 1, 110, l.3-6)

2. The colloquy bespeaks the late-medieval preoccupations in England ranging from devotional customs, saintly exemplarity, doctrinal and eschatological matters to the deep-rooted hostility to merchants, usurers, women, heretics including the iconomachist Jews⁶, as well as the simoniac

3 *Dives and Pauper*, Vol.I, Part 1, s2, Table (A), Primum Preceptum, l.3.

4 *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 860. The first entry of the definition of the verb *seduce*.

5 *Dives and Pauper*, Vol.I, Part 2, Fifth Precept, Ch.3, 5, l.22-27: “Therfor God lykenyth flatereris to hem that plastryng & peyntyn wallys & wowys withoutyn, for thing that is foul thei makyn to semyn fayr & makyn folc to han lykynge in her synnys. Therfor God seith that the synnere makyth the wal of synne atwexsyn hym and God, but flatereris plastryng & peyntyn the wal of synne”.

6 Iconomachism means fighting images, which in the case of judaism goes as far as aniconism or absence of all

dispositions observed among the clergy. Although *Dives and Pauper* reads like a constructive discussion rather than a monologic sermon delivered by a religious translator of God's Word and Truth, the disproportion between Dives's comparatively short points or objections and Pauper's much longer and elaborate reactions, clarifications, and corrections suggests that the latter functions as a pastor and a pedagogue engaged in showing the right way to a fallible layman in need of insight into Christian perfection. The tutor's strategy is maieutical since the dialogue leads to the gradual disclosure of the evangelical message. The debate proceeds horizontally in a collaborative manner. Dialogue, in Nicole Rice's opinion, "offers the literary technique for keeping clergy and laity in cooperative conversation"⁷. Without his interlocutor's incomplete or erroneous understanding of the Precepts, Pauper would be deprived of the occasion to open his eyes on some essential elements of the Christian doctrine, like the devotional image and the abstraction to which it refers. The "occasional glimpses of late medieval life and manners"⁸ tell us about the rather pessimistic outlook in *Dives and Pauper*. Stress is put on a general state of decline, disunity, and disharmony. Moira Fitzgibbons speaks of allusions made to the ambient "moral decay, political strife, religious controversy"⁹. This explains why Pauper appeals to engage in a *gostly fyght* or spiritual battle against evil (DP, I, 2, 311, l.134-137). The sense that the nation's health and strength are threatened by a spreading blight derives from the acknowledgement of a lack of responsibility, concern, and temperance in the conduct of both political and religious leaders¹⁰. One blatant sign of England's spiritual impoverishment can be found in the long exchange of questions and answers about images of the cult. Wycliffite hostility towards the growing number of images of Christ, the Virgin Mary, the saints, as well as other devotional objects in churches was rather recent at the time of the composition of *Dives and Pauper*. The two disputants raise a moot yet crucial point. In a cultural context compared by Moira Fitzgibbons to the *société du spectacle* defined by Guy Debord, the religious picture was regarded as a teaching tool with the illiterate: "Ymagerie is leful, for it is a booc to the lewyd folc." (DP, I, 1, 2, l.1). This statement in the paremiological style is made in Table A which precedes the bulk of the text. The reader is warned from the start that the commentary of

images.

7 N. Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature*, 51.

8 B. Lindström, "Two Notes on *Dives and Pauper*", 331.

9 M. Fitzgibbons, "Women, Tales, and 'Talking Back' in *Pore Caitif* and *Dives and Pauper*", in *Middle English Religious Writing in Practice*, 184.

10 In *Dives and Pauper*, Vol.I, Part 1, Fourth Precept, Ch.17, 337, l.29-32, Pauper quotes Saint Paul to advocate unconditional obedience to the prelate or the sovereign: "Obeyth to your prelatys & souereynys & be ye meke & soget to hem, for why, seith he, they ben wol besy & trauaylyn to sauyn your soulis, as thei that schul yeuyn answeere for your soulis at the doom." In reply, Dives deplores at l.32-35: "Many of hem caryn wol lytil for manys soule. Thei caryn more to getyn monye & mennys good, and many of hem ben wol feble lyuerys."

the Ten Commandments will open on a controversial matter set forth at the very beginning of the “First Precept”: “Thu shalt, seyght he, haue noon othere straunge godys aforne me. Thu shalt makyn the noo grauyn thing, noo maument, noo lyknesse that is abouyn in heuene ne that is benethyn in erthe ne of noo thyng that is in the water vnder the erthe.” (DP, I, 1, 81, 1.2-5). The initial commandment, in truth a forceful and weighty prohibition, permeates the others. For instance, in the explication of the Third Precept about the duty to observe rest on holy days Pauper spells out to Dives that miracles and plays are allowed on a Sunday as long as they honourably perform the major biblical episodes that should be part and parcel of Christian culture. Contrary to what the layman assumes profane entertainment is not sinful provided it fulfils devotional and didactic purposes: “Steraclis, pleyys & dauncis that arn don principaly for deuocioun & honest merthe [to teche men to loue God the more] [...] arn leful” (DP, I, 1, 293, 1.13-16). The lively visual depictions on stage of holy characters and events employ highly evocative images that catch the eye and strike the mind. Though lifeless images of the cult constitute an equally efficient catechetical tool on the Christian who comes to attend service and pray, the risk is that images could be turned into idols and become the recipients of misdirected worship, which would be a case of idolatry, prohibited by the First Commandment. God “excludyth al maner of ydolatrie that is defendit be the firste commandment” (DP, I, 1, 299, 1.15-16), Pauper insists. Earlier Dives remarks that lay suspicion about idolatrous practices also derives from what he implicitly points as a clerical trick, the use of incense during service with a view to enhancing the mesmeric quality of the picture actually produced or verbally mentioned, particularly that of Christ’s Passion symbolised by the Eucharist. “Thuryficacioun and encensyng was be held tyme an heye dyuyn wurshepe, and manye seyntys weryn put to the deth for they woldyn nought encensyn ymagys, stockys and stonys.” (DP, I, 1, 110, 1.1-6).

3. Dives is aware of the difficulty for Christians in reconciling the multiplication of images with the duty to “seruyn God & to ben occupyd with hym & nothing don but for his loue & to his worchepe” (DP, I, 1, 303, 1.52-53), at least on holy days. Their increasing number in English churches actually resulted from a lucrative trade, which raised the issue of a use exceeding their primary intent. Referring to the Hebraic celebration of the Atonement, Pauper underlines God’s infinite mercy in granting forgiveness to the Jews for their worship of the Golden Calf, a model that Christians should flee (DP, I, 1, 295-296, 1.73-91). As a reaction to Dives’s scathing censorship of images that only deserve to be burnt (an echo to the 1401 *De Heretico Comburendo* edict), Pauper defends images as long as it is God that is being prayed to, not the pictorial representation as such.

DIUES. Qherof seruyn these ymagys? I wolde they weryn brent euerychon. PAUPER. They seruyn of thre thynggys. For they been ordeynyd to steryn manys mende to thynkyn of Cristys incarnacioun and of the passioun and of holye seyntys lyuys. Also they been ordeynyd to steryn mannys affecciou and his herte to deuocioun, for often man is more steryd be syghte than be heryng or redyngge. Also they been ordeynyd to been a tokene and a book to the lewyd peple, that they moun redyn in ymagerye and peynture that clerkys redyn in boke, as the lawe seyght [...]. (DP, I, 1, 82, l.36-44)

The question of the legitimacy of images of the cult, sanctioned for their catechetical and devotional functions, was topical because of the economic conception of pictures and objects as accessories of piety and consumer goods, to a certain extent, in growing demand in pre-Reformation England. The visual artefacts produced for worship were mere tokens of a spiritual reality, but they also represented a form of capital. “Voices from the image debate express anxieties about *objects*; images are not only devotional signs but also forms of circulating capital, part of the culture of things”¹¹. Late-medieval England was the scene of an intensifying effort to build or improve churches, especially in East Anglia where *Dives and Pauper* was supposedly written¹². However, both *Dives and Pauper* in the work under scrutiny deplore the decline in earnest lay devotion, and the clerical lack of concern about the symbolical aspects of service¹³, during which the priest speaks before the image of the cross which the simple parishioners do not misinterpret to mean Christ himself. “Al this wurshepe doth the preist at messe afor the ymage, and thow I hope that ther is noo man ne womman so lewyd that he wele seyn that the preist synggyght his messe to the ymage ne makyght his preyere to the ymage” (DP, I, 1, 87, l.37-40).

4. The clergy are not spared the accusation of worldliness and hypocrisy¹⁴. The attention increasingly paid to material pictures of saints, patrons, and martyrs was seen as contaminating the spiritual realm. Jean Wirth wrote that the Church “claimed that the respect paid to images went to the immaterial prototype, not to a piece of painted wood”¹⁵. The “image-explosion” (Stanbury, 16)

11 S. Stanbury, *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England*, 12.

12 A. Hudson and H. Leith Spencer, “Old Author, New Work: The Sermons of MS Longleat 4”, *Medium Aevum*, 221. The authors of the article contend that the Longleat manuscript was written in East Anglia. The same can be assumed concerning *Dives and Pauper* that precedes the Sermons, which contain references to the former.

13 *Dives and Pauper*, Vol.I, Part 2, Eighth Precept, Ch.8, 228-229, l.58-61. “PAUPER. Yif it be so than that men of holy chirche hauynge these tokenys of Cristis passioun in her messe-syngynge han non deuocioun in Cristis passioun ne mende of hys passion they beryn fals witnesse, for it is nout with hem inward as the tokenys schewyn outward.”

14 A. Hudson and H. Leith Spencer, *op. cit.*, 230. Before *The Longleat Sermons*, *Dives and Pauper* castigates the contemporary Church through the preacher’s mouth. Here are a few lines from the article: “The root of corruption is alleged to have been the avarice and ambition of the clergy”. At a further point, the authors remark on the increasingly educated and “financially and socially secure laypeople”, “aware of the discrepancy between gospel precept and ecclesiastical actuality”.

15 J. Wirth, *L’Image médiévale*, 299. Our translation of “prétendait que le respect manifesté aux images allait au prototype immatériel et non pas à un morceau de bois peint.”

blurred the rightful-blameworthy worship dialectic. The problem arose from the clerical need for images to perform their liturgical mission. Now, the images designed for the cult were purchased by well-to-do laypeople who underwrote or donated them to the local church. The relationship between patrons and the clergy who received their generous gifts was modified by this profitable commerce. The context was one of circulation and exchange of goods and currencies. Concurrent with the market of devotional images and objects was an incarnational economy (30), a form of spiritual transaction consisting of posthumous prayers to secure afterlife salvation. Ironically the belief in the possibility to purchase paradise through lay endowments led to negotiating with the hereafter. Assimilating cult imagery with capital opened the door to the negotiability of death itself, because the rich laymen who were philanthropic gift-givers tended to believe that they could afford a spiritual insurance of sorts.

Beye away thi synnys with elmessis; nout that we mon beyen heuene ne foryeuenesse of synne, but be elmesse-doynge we mon deseruyn to han foryeuenesse of synne & heuene blysse, and so byynge is takyn for deseruyng. The fyete caas is whan a man for to han pes byyth away the wrong that he suffryth in spiritual ryghth whan he is sekyr that his cause is ryghtful [...]. (DP, I, 2, 177, l.30-36)

The ups and downs of the imago pietatis

“He was accusyd to the [pope], Seynt Gregory, queche blamyd hym gretly for that he hadde so dystroyd the ymagys. But vttyrly he preysid hym for that he defendydde meen to wurshepyn ymagys.” (DP, I, 1, 83, l.47-50)

5. Judeo-Christian anthropology depends on images, whose existence is justified by the fact that man was made in the image of God¹⁶ which is *acheiropoietic*, the opposite of a man-made artefact. In the interpretation of the Tenth Commandment, Pauper reminds Dives of what the book of Deuteronomy says about the idolatry in which the children of Israel indulged:

Acursyd be that man & woman that makith ony grauyn ymage or yotyn ymage that is abhominacioun to God, warc of the hondys of men of craft, to worchepyn outward with his body and settyth it in pryue place, that is to seye in his herte, to settyh hys feyth and his trost thereynne so to worchepyn it

16 J-C. Schmitt, *Le Corps des images*, 97.

with hys herte inward. (DP, I, 2, 313, 1.28-33)

The disapproval of image worship in Christianity is substantiated by the artificial character of images fashioned by man. The fictitiousness of images is deemed proof of their being misleading illusions sometimes ascribed to the devil. It raises the question of the status of objects invested with sacrality, what Jean-Claude Schmitt calls “the dialectic movement of what is shown and what is concealed”¹⁷ aimed at kindling piety. Yet, the use of pictures in Christian worship is subsequent to that of the Holy Writ, the cross, sacramental instruments, and relics. Visual representations in a church are bestowed limited religious significance and lesser sanctity because they pertain to the *imaginatio* and stand halfway between physical perception through the five senses and the higher mental level. Tempting though they may be, the pictorial evocations of the history of Christ and the saints need to be offered to the illiterate’s gaze for them to learn as if they could read from the holy book. The sight of the cross fulfils the doctrinal mission of bringing to mind the redemptive significance of the crucifixion which is the foundation of the Christian cult. Pauper resorts to Saint Bernard’s recommendation to worship Christ for his boundless forgiveness, not His material semblance whatever the form: “I preye the, rede thin book and falle doun to grounde and thanke thin God that wolde doon so mechil for the, and wurshepe hym abouyn alle thyngge, nought the ymage, nought the stok, stoon ne tree, but hym” (DP, I, 1, 85, 1.49-52). The compunction and painful humility felt by the sinful soul are thought to be aroused by the *imago pietatis*, from which some miraculous manifestations will hopefully stem. The oscillation between reprobation and praise of worship images is summed up in Pauper’s allusion to Pope Gregory’s belief in the usefulness of images for the untaught as long as they learn from a picture what ought to be adored. To put it in a nutshell, the holy text retained the prestige of authority and remained the privileged vehicle of clerical ideology, but the image played a role to be reckoned with from the ninth century onwards after an iconoclastic period. A few centuries later, even though the biblical material was still held to be the primary depository of the Word, which provided the clergy with a means to preserve their spiritual legitimacy as the guardians of the Creed, a new visual culture flourished in the Christian Western world, “more open to lay participation in processions, confraternities, private devotions”¹⁸. The late medieval period more particularly evinced a rather business-like attitude to the production, circulation, and use of images along artistic norms designed to attain a satisfactory balance between excessive iconolatry and staunch heretic iconoclasm, or at least iconomachism, i.e. resistance to

17 “Le mouvement dialectique du montré et du caché,” *ibid.*, 294.

18 “Plus ouverte à la participation des laïcs : dans les processions, les confréries, les dévotions privées”, *ibid.*, 133.

images. Judged on their form and content, pictures were liable to be found dangerously seductive more than downright unorthodox in fact.

6. In the days of *Dives and Pauper* devotion legitimised images. Their worship was recognized, if not advocated, because the contemporary theological outlook took a more practical turn. Prayers and offerings to effigies were assumed to add authenticity to man's communion with heaven. In addition, pious contemplation involved a ritual performance that appealed not only to the *cognitio* but also to the *affectus*, the two essential ingredients of the Christian faith according to Hugh of Saint Victor (Wirth, 278). The imaginary construction and its eloquent symbolism that rose in the mind at the sight of a picture sparked emotions, all the more so when the representation was anthropomorphic. Sometimes the object of devotion had even been given an enthralling sensuous corporeal appearance. The fascinating expressiveness achieved by image-makers in the pictorial incarnations of holy figures tended to subject the believer to the powers of the saints, whose protection was sought after. Worship was unthinkable without vivid iconic agents of piety, some argued, whereas others castigated the lavish use of bright colours and luxurious ornaments. The veneration of images became the most conspicuous manifestation of religion; it was "central to worship commitment"¹⁹. Truthful and acute religiousness took second place, whilst offerings and donations began to be quantified along with the time spent in prayer in the context of the thriving business of redemptive pardons and sumptuary practices. Excessive personal expenditures and luxurious habits were restricted by some regulations on religious grounds in the late Middle Ages. Most aspects of everyday life including dress might lead to morally blameworthy extravagance. The theological examination of lechery prohibited in the Sixth Commandment soon focused on women's costly and tantalizing attire identified as one cause of that sin. Pauper quotes Saint Paul advocating sartorial sobriety so that lust will not be aroused. He deplors that tight-fitting and short clothes attract the eye (DP, I, 2, 91, 1.14-17). On the other hand, he justifies the splendour of a female saint's appearance in the visual arts reminding his interlocutor that holy figures like Saint Cecilia neither sank into pride and pomp nor passed "measure and good manere" (DP, I, 2, 92, 1.36).

Petir & Powyl defendedyn nout uttyrlyche swyche aray but thei defendedyn women swyche aray to usyn in pryde or to prouokyn folc to lecherye & to usyn swyche aray pasyng her astat, for we fyndyn that Sent Cecilie & many othir holy women wentyn adyth in clothis of gold & in ryche perre & weredyn the heyre vndir that solempne atyr. (DP, I, 2, 91, 1.25-30)

7. Because it is through the sense of sight that man is tempted to sin, images should act as

¹⁹ "Elle passe au centre de l'investissement culturel", J. Wirth, *L'Image médiévale*, 278.

deterrents. The anecdote of the wife keeping herself safe from adulterous temptation whenever she looks at the tattered shirt covered in blood sent by her husband from the battlefield (DP, I, 2, 99-102) is a didactic device employed by Pauper to denounce the seduction of images. This particular case is unexpectedly illustrated by a piece of verse that provides an illuminating example of hypotyposis²⁰; the sullied fabric serves as a morbid reminder of the married knight's agony, and sustains the wife's faithfulness at the same time. Devotion slays the lust of the flesh. Another remedy, Pauper carries on, against lecherous intentions is the thought of hell. The image of the burning pit in which atrocious never-ending torments are inflicted on sinners is given a heightened dramatic cast through a strikingly vivid enumeration of horrendous details. "Ther her syghte schal ben foule wormys, froudys, neddrys & horryble facys of the fendis & mysschapyn thingis. Ther wyckyd wormys schul gnawyn the herte rotis." (DP, I, 2, 103, l.112-115). Devotion stimulated by depictions, real or imaginary, can be an efficient bulwark²¹ against lechery which incites to covet a seductive image. Blind worship of man-made images leads to "gostly auouterye" (DP, I, 2, 119, l.2), spiritual lechery tantamount in Pauper's eyes to turning to the devil. When celebrating the mass ministers of the cult don a symbolical attire. If they fail to keep in mind our Lord's Passion, as their sober dress should reflect, they deceive the people. "For in clothinge they schuldyn schewyn sadnesse, honeste & lownesse" (DP, I, 2, 227, l.8). In other words, men of religion are expected to embody an image of humility synonymous with earnest faith. Yet explaining the meaning of the bishop's attire, Pauper deplors that more often than not the episcopal vestment of true piety is only exterior (DP, I, 2, 228-229, l.58-61). The image that inspires heartfelt devotion should therefore be the opposite of the false idol of gold worshipped by the avaricious: "fals god is betokenyd be the ymage of gold" (DP, I, 2, 264, l.58). Despite the warning against the danger of idolatry churches compete in the display of objects of the cult, sculptures, and frescoes highlighting the donors' social ambitions, enviable status, and ostentatious piety. Pauper condemns rich men's lush gifts for all to gaze at. They fall into the lures of the fashionable eye-catching icons and are dazzled (seduction makes blind) by a form of liberality assumed to yield a good return on spiritual investment. With clerical acquiescence, the laity engaged in prodigal devotion give in to a worldly sumptuary temptation under cover of praiseworthy devoutness. It is a case of economic wealth exalted into moral virtuousness, the acceptance by the late medieval Church of what Jean Wirth

20 U. Eco, *De la littérature*, 263. The definition given by Eco reads as follows : « Non tant représentation, mais plutôt technique pour susciter l'effort de composer une représentation visuelle (de la part du lecteur). »

21 The metaphor of the shield and armour employed in the pictorial evocation of angels ready to defend the Christian soul against fiends would be equally appropriate. It can be found in *Dives and Pauper*, Vol.I, Part 1, First Precept, Ch.8, 96, l.29-38.

calls “the development of this social and worldly function of the sacred”²². The propagation of images resulting from their profitable commerce concurrent with the stylistic innovations and liberties taken by painters in reaction to the virulent iconoclastic attacks definitely contributes to the tense theological climate in which the writer of *Dives and Pauper* raises the issue of the adoration of images, the object of the First Commandment. No wonder the rich layman and the poor preacher deliberate over the ornamentation of secular churches where the presence of gold, silver, and precious gems in reliquaries, liturgical tools, and paintings should be read as the aspiration to be in communion with the saintly figures. Significantly enough, the saints are designated by the metaphor of the living gems or *lapides vivi* of Christ’s faith (Schmitt, 285).

DIUES. They weryn nought so gay in clothyng as they been peyntyd. PAUPER. That is soth. The ryche peynture betokenyght the blisse that they been now inne, nought the aray that they haddyn vpon erthe, for manye of hem, as Seynt Pouyl seyght, wentyn in wol feble aray, in gotys skynnys, in bauseynys skynnys wol nedy [...]. Neuertheles kynggys, prelatys and grete lordys that weryn wol holy been peyntyd rychely after here staat and here dignete. (DP, I, 1, 94, l.25-34)

The subtle shimmering hues of precious metals and stones in the artistic rendering of biblical subjects both create the illusion of their physicality and enhance their godliness. Gold leaves are often used for the background in the portrait of a saint or the evocation of a mystery of the Faith. This could be interpreted as a way to signify that an image is ontologically divine and nonetheless seems to come to life before the Christian’s very eyes. Provided the beholder is able to see beyond the materiality of the contemplated figure’s *majestas* aesthetically highlighted by gold and gems, he can perceive its celestial *virtus*. Still, the line is thin between the feeling that body and soul are suffused with the salutary aura of the depicted model and the thaumaturgical fallacy. In his treatment of the Seventh Commandment which castigates theft, Pauper draws Dives’s attention to the threat posed by illusory miracles promised by false preachers who “blendyn the peple in falsnesse, and so they yeuyn the worchep of myraclis-doynge to ymagis that man hat mad” (DP, I, 2, 134, l.10-11).

Some Wycliffite undertones in *Dives and Pauper*?

“Me thynkith that it were betere to yeuyn the monye to the

²² “Le développement de cette fonction mondaine du sacré”, J. Wirth, *L'Image Médiévale*, 281.

pore folc [...] than so to spendyn it in solempnyte and pride and makynge of heye chyrchis, in riche vestimentys, in curyous wyndowys, in grete bellys". (DP, I, 1, 189-190, l.1-6)

8. Given the spread of devotional practices from the 12th century onwards in a thriving economic market, where the wealthy bourgeoisie evinced a taste for appealing pictures that stimulated devoutness, the liturgical function doubled with an ornamental aura of the pictures of the saints, the Virgin Mary, and Christ was emphasised. Not only had artists like Giotto in Italy virtually triggered an aesthetic revolution in the representation of religious scenes but the affluent laity that Dives stands for could afford richly decorated frescoes and statues designed as outward signs of faith and affluence. The more seductive the images displayed inside a church, the more earnest the donor's religiousness was held to be. In a religion centred on inner spirituality it was no surprise that the attractiveness of images of the cult should be contested by some. On the condition that the use of images was neither idolatrous (uncritically adulatory) nor superstitious, Thomas Aquinas absolved *latria* and (*hyper*)*dulia*. He quoted Aristotle's notion of the double movement that elevates the soul toward the image as a physical picture and the reflection of a suprahuman reality at the same time. He agreed with John of Damascus that Christ could be equated to His portrait, which thereby deserved to be the object of a *latria* cult. "Il en résulte qu'on doit la même vénération à l'image du Christ et au Christ lui-même. Donc, puisque le Christ est adoré d'une adoration de latrie, il est logique d'adorer de même son image"²³. *Latria* meaning adoration in Latin designates the exaltation of Christ and the cross only. *Hyperdulia* is worship made to the Virgin Mary, the veneration of the saints being known as *dulia* which stems from the Greek *doulos* i.e. *slave*, *servant*.

So, leue frend, ye shullyn vnderstondyn that the wurshpe qheche is clepyd *latria* shal be doon only to God. The wurshpe that is clepyd *dulia* is comoun bothe to God and man, for we shullyn wurshpeyn man, womman and aungel nought for hemself but princepaly for God, for that they been mad to Godys ymage. For they been Godys seruauntys and Godys ministrys. (DP, I, 1, 106, l.40-46)

9. Although idolatry was traditionally deemed shameful, the Church in the last two centuries of the Middle Ages not only condoned the worship of images but perceived it as a remarkably powerful devotional instrument. The contradiction between the Thomistic vindication of pictorial representations of divinity and the mistrust surrounding idolatry bespoke the ideological intent to sanction visual depictions as vehicles of the Word, while ascertaining that they cannot play a

23 D. Menozzi, P. Baillet, et F. Boespflug, *Les Images, l'Église et les arts visuels*, 135.

sacramental role in worship lest it should undermine the priest's aura as the 'bailiff' or minister of the holy sacraments and their dispensation. The ecclesial concern with retaining spiritual power over the laity by encouraging the worship of relics, paintings, and sculptures—in place of the study of the holy text itself—triggered Wycliff's discontent. Fearing an idolatrous veer in lay devotion, Wycliff argued that iconodulist piety was bound to secularise the religious cult: "les pratiques de piété associées aux représentations font courir le danger d'une mondanisation du christianisme." (Menozzi, 35). Wycliffite iconomachism was echoed not only by the more radical Lollards but also by Jean Gerson in France who in his *Tractatus pro devotis simplicibus* vented his misgivings about the alluring effect of potentially lascivious images that highlighted corporeality instead of sobriety and plainness. The irresistible seduction of the visual embodiments of Christ, the Holy Virgin, and the saints in the later Middle Ages compromised the earnestness of the homage paid by the layman but also the cleric in prayer before a concrete picture that created the illusion of its flesh-and-bone presence. *Dives and Pauper* appeared one century before the Reformation, but already revealed an acute awareness of the essential role played by the visual arts in enlightening the common people in the Faith and Creed of the Christian Church. However, the content and form of devotional images needed to be under strict ecclesiastical supervision in a pre-humanist artistic context that "humanised" the subjects pictured in a more sensuous and mundane style. Just as the new art might lead astray on account of the fascination for opulence, so offerings made to seductive effigies testified to worshipping resplendent painted signs, especially in monasteries and abbeys because they did not need further financial sustenance. Dives ironically observes:

I suppose that the seyntyng in herthe weryn nought arayyd so gay, wyt shoon of syluer and clothys of gold, of baudekyn, of velwet, ful of brochis and rynggys and precious stonys, as here ymagis been qheche the peple offryght, for they schuldyn an had mechil cold on here feet and sone a been robyd of here clothis. (DP, I, 1, 100, 1.35-40)

Feigning to ignore the thrust directed at ecclesiastical iconodulism and taste for luxurious pictures, Pauper replies with what sounds like witticism. At this point of *Dives and Pauper* Priscilla Barnum in her explanatory notes indicates that the saints' silver shoes are an allusion to an inventory of the possessions of pre-Reformation Lincoln Cathedral, and the feet may well be an in-joke concerning what Pauper has previously told him about the symbolism of the feet as man's love and affection. Such an interpretation can be found in Wycliff's Latin sermons as well as in Wycliffite sermons²⁴:

Neuereles, al this may be doon for deuocioun that meen han to the seyntyng and to shewyn mannyng

²⁴ *Dives and Pauper*, Vol.II, Explanatory Notes, 35.

deuocioun. And here feet been shoodde wyt syluer for here feet shuldyn ellys solyid ouyrmychil wyt mennys mouthys that kyssyn hem.” (DP, I, 1, 100-101, 1.41-45)

10. *Dives and Pauper* is concurrent with the controversy raised by Wycliff and then the Lollards who advocated the legitimacy of the laity's access to Scripture. As early as the 1390s, English theologians were constrained in their writings, and in 1401 the repressive piece of legislation *De Heretico Comburendo* silenced Wycliffite attacks on the ecclesial authorities. A few years later between 1407 and 1409, an even more drastic promulgation, Archbishop Arundel's *Constitutions*, restricted the contents and influence of preaching, teaching, and writing activities²⁵. The intention was to gag any theologian suspected of thinking outside of the institutional box. The Church was willing to preserve its prerogative in the force-feeding of the basics of the faith. What was also denounced by Wycliffites and the Lollard movement was the Church's lack of concern for the material welfare and spiritual salvation of the poor, so intent was it to thrive on the commerce of indulgences closely linked with devotional objects and images. Pauper is most probably a member of the mendicant orders. In the 1410s the mendicant communities had reached a supranational scope too. In London some fifty years earlier large precincts were already occupied by the main mendicant orders, which from peripheral groups had evolved to fully organised and integrated communities²⁶. As they lived among the population, contact with the laity was easy to make. Yet the Franciscans' artificial destitution turned out to be detrimental to the situation of the real, secular poor, from whom the resources for charity were channeled away to the mendicant friars, whose poverty was claimed to be a token of their spiritual election. One may wonder whether the exaltation by the medieval Church of simplicity and humility of body, mind, and soul was not after all employed to justify the social and political preeminence of those who studied Scripture, owned, knew, and sometimes governed²⁷. The promise of afterlife retribution for those on the fringe of society may well have been used to keep them in their underprivileged position²⁸. In other words,

25 R. Firth Green, "Textual Production and Textual Communities", in *Cambridge Companion to Middle English Literature 1100-1500*, 28. "In fact by 1409 the authorities of Canterbury had become so threatened by this kind of activity that the Archbishop of Canterbury officially proscribed all but the most innocuously pastoral kinds of religious writing in the vernacular, and it was presumably for this reason that even the relatively inoffensive *Dives and Pauper* fell under suspicion in the ecclesiastical court in Norwich."

26 J. Röhrkasten, "The Mendicant Orders in Urban Life and Society: The Case of London", *Religious and Laity in Western Europe, 1000-1400*, 341.

27 *Dives and Pauper*, Vol.I, Part 2, Fifth Precept, ch.8, 16, 1.16-24: "DIUES. This poynt of manslaute touchit mychil men of holy chirche, for, as the lawe seith, the tythis of holy chirche arn tributis of hem that ben in nede to releuyn hem in her nede. And al that men of holy chirche han it is the pore menys goodis, & her housis schuldyn ben comoun to alle men at nede. They schuldyn ben besy to receyuyn pylgrymys & kepyn hospitalite aftir her power, xvi, q. i, Decime, et Quoniam quicquid. Wherfor, me thinkith, yif ony pore folc perche be her defaute & for that thei wiln nout helpyn hem thei ben gyilty of manslaute."

28 J. Dalarun, *Gouverner c'est servir*, 281-306.

the social organisation in the world of Dives and Pauper was at odds with the Christian precept of serving God piously and deserving His grace. Pauper is the mouthpiece of an author who took part in the moralisation of Christian life planned by the Church. His spiritual governance in passing on the divine law and truth derives from the belief in the prime importance of the Christian pastor. In the service of his flock, embodied by Dives in want of instruction, the preacher somehow wields a form of power. The clerics' pastoral power was precisely what Wycliff and his followers refused to acknowledge. On the contrary they believed that as a human being the cleric was hardly less fallible than his audience. This seems to corroborate the fact that Pauper is not a supporter of Wycliff. His voice throughout the disputation belongs to a mediator between God and the sinner. He fulfils a vicarious function, and does not condemn those who make offerings under the aura of highly seductive pictures.

DIUES. Thu seydyt that meen shuldyn nought offryn but only to God ne knelyn on bothe knees but only to God, and we seen at eye that meen offryn to the preist in cherche and knelyn wyt bothe knees to the preist in shryfte. PAUPER. Meen offryn nought to the preist but only to God, as I seyde ferst, be the hond of the preist, for the preist is Godys minstre, ordeynyd to reseyuyn thyng that is offryd to God, as tythis and deuociounys [...]. (DP, I, 1, 109-110, l.7-15)

11. Underpinning the *disputatio* is the rejection of images suspected of leading the believer's thoughts astray, and at the same time an awareness of the appeal of artistic representations of the celestial sphere to the praying congregation. The afore-mentioned quotation points to the kinship between the giving of offerings, the visual arts, and religious visions²⁹. Medieval theories of visions rested on the Augustinian tripartite definition, according to which the Christian faith gradually passed from material perception through eyesight to spiritual perception—in which the object is no longer physically present but simply imagined or remembered—to the intellectual vision of the mind or *mens* where the intelligible elements did not match the images anymore. The intellectual vision was attained by the mystics for whom piety, to be considered truly heartfelt, must be entirely disconnected from images. Yet artificial depictions were in demand for lay and clerical devotion. Some went as far as to invest them with curative and apotropaic properties, so much so that sometimes paintings or statues came to life in the mind's eye, as illustrated by various accounts given of statues and paintings speaking, bleeding, or shedding tears. It is evidence of how attractive images could be when the artist seemed to grasp divinity through a demanding spiritual and mental

29 S. Ringbom, *Les Images de dévotion XIIIe-XVe siècle*, 17. At the time, Ringbom explains, religious imagination was influenced by the works of ecclesiastical art.

process similar to the mystic's. When dealing with such representations one must not lose sight of the fact that the praying man like a painter was supposed to focus on the archetype or hypostasis that he sought to portray while resisting the distraction of the visible sublunar reality.

Conclusion

12. The medieval era in the Western world left the Old Testament's aniconism behind and swayed between iconoclasm and iconodulism. As early as the 8th century John of Damascus justified the worship of images, claiming that the material iconic form could rightfully be honoured by the believer since it embodied God's grace. The Word had indeed taken on the human shape of Christ to be revealed to mankind from the christological viewpoint. At the end of the 9th century, the veneration of visual representations of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints was accepted, while idolatry remained the target of ecclesial disapproval. Although inferior to the intellect, sight was considered the first of the five senses because it consisted of a visual and emotional perception of the beauty of the divine majesty. The painter resorted to typological iconic features to produce a picture that contained a celestial presence with an aura of sacred mystery.

In special tokene, the ymage of oure lady is peynted wyt a child in here lefght arm in tokene that she is modyr of God, and wyt a lylve or ellys a rose in here ryght hond in tokene that she is maydyn wytouten ende and flour of alle wymmen. [And so of other seyntys whos ymagys han dyuerse figurys in her handys & other placys for dyuerse vertues & martirdomys that tho seyntys suffredyn & haddyn in her lyfys.] The ymage of Seynt Petyr is peynted wyt keyis in his hond in tokene that Crist betoke Seynt Petyr the keyis of holy cherche and of the kyngdam of heuene (DP, I, 1, 91-92, 1.4-13)

In the economy of Christian salvation throughout the Middle Ages, images were indispensable doctrinal tools as much as Scripture was, the only difference between text and pictorial counterparts lying in the fact that the illiterate could not be instructed in the Creed and the scriptural truth without the iconic medium. Images conceived as enticing incentives for religious fervour brought the beholder under the delusion of revering the hypostasis. In other words, the ornamental, apotropaic and thaumaturgical properties lent to religious pictures may outshine their catechetical and pastoral role. This was borne out by the growing circulation of indulgences assumed to reward the parishioner's devoutness on the condition that he take out an afterlife insurance. Besides, the ecclesial institution granted recognition to the supernatural influence credited to some pictorial

representations worshipped. It seemed that the efficiency of images in the successful commerce of indulgences reduced devotional practices to the manifestation of a transaction. Faith found itself divested of spiritual depth and fell under the market ethos of investment in a surety for salvation secured by alms, benefactions, presents, and the purchase of pardons. Perceiving a devotional image entirely as a virtually palpable incarnation of the specific virtues for which the saintly figure stood was forgetting about the essentially abstract nature of the picture. Pauper throws light upon the metonymic significance of the holy cross. “Crist in holy wryght oftentymys is clepyd a cros, for the cros is his special tokene. And so sumtyme we spekyn to the cros as to Crist hymself.” (DP, I, 1, 88-89, 1.29-30). A picture is worthless as such because it is nothing but an iconic incentive for greater devotion. “It hatgh noo vertue at al. It is noothyng ellys but a book and a tokene to the lewyd peple” (DP, I, 1, 90, 1.22-23). The believer’s error derives from the delusiveness of the image that *seduces* in the etymological sense of *leading astray*. The immaterial entity depicted is individualised through the gaze of one person, whose homage paid to the saint takes on an idolatrous tinge if the picture aesthetically appeals to the senses more than it does the intellect. The seduction of devotional pictures makes them dissimilar images (Wirth, 346) in that they give a deceptive reflection of God’s perfection. Virtually as much as the written sacred text, the medieval picture lies at the core of the weighty ecclesiastical *appareil idéologique d’état* in control of the consciences, to borrow Althusser’s metaphor. Nevertheless this privileged position enjoyed by the Church was jeopardised at the beginning of the 15th century on account of the lay and clerical sumptuary conduct entailed by image-spurred piety. The criticism levelled in *Dives and Pauper* at the contemporary use of images in devotional practices somewhat foreshadowed the iconoclastic Reformation one century later.

Works Cited

BARNUM, PRISCILLA HEATH. *Dives and Pauper*. Vol.I, Part 1. Early English Text Society, 1976.

BARNUM, PRISCILLA HEATH. *Dives and Pauper*. Vol.I, Part 2. Early English Text Society, 1980.

BARNUM, PRISCILLA HEATH. *Dives and Pauper*. Vol.II. Early English Text Society, 2004.

DALARUN, JACQUES. *Gouverner c'est servir. Essai de démocratie médiévale*. Paris: Alma Éditeur, Essais Histoire, 2012.

- ECO, UMBERTO. *De la littérature*. Trad. de l'italien Myriem Bouzaher. Paris: Grasset, 2002.
- FITZGIBBONS, MOIRA. "Women, Tales, and 'Talking Back' in *Pore Caitif* and *Dives and Pauper*". *Middle English Religious Writing in Practice: Texts, Readers, and Transformations. Late Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Vol.21. Ed. NICOLE RICE. Turnhout: Brepols, 2013. 181-214.
- GREEN, RICHARD FIRTH. "Textual Production and Textual Communities". *The Cambridge Companion to Middle English Literature 1150-1500*. Ed. LARRY SCANLON. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. 25-36.
- HUDSON, ANNE AND HELEN LEITH SPENCER. "Old Author, New Work: The Sermons of MS Longleat 4". *Medium Aevum*. Vol.53. Ed. BLACKWELL (1932) 1984: 220-238.
- LINDSTRÖM, BENGT. "Two Notes on *Dives and Pauper*". *Studia Neophilologica: a Journal of Germanic and Romance Philology* 46. (1928) 1974: 331-337.
- MENOZZI, DANIELE, PHILIPPE BAILLET ET FRANÇOIS BOESPFLUG. Dossier conçu et rassemblé par. *Les Images, l'Église et les arts visuels*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1991.
- Oxford English Dictionary*. Second Edition. Vol.XIV. Oxford: Clarendon Press, (1989) 1991.
- RICE, NICOLE R. *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- RINGBOM, SIXTEN. *Les Images de dévotion (XIIe-XVe siècle)*. Trad. de l'anglais Alix Girod. Paris: Gérard Monfort Éditeur, 1995.
- RÖHRKASTEN, JENS. "The Mendicant Orders in Urban Life and Society: The Case of London". *Laity in Western Europe, 1000-1400. Interaction, Negotiation, and Power*. Ed. EMILIA JAMROZIAK AND JANET BURTON. Turnhout: Brepols, 2006. 333-355.
- SCHMITT, JEAN-CLAUDE. *Le Corps des images. Essais sur la culture visuelle du Moyen Âge*. Paris: Gallimard, Le temps des images, 2002.
- STANBURY, SARAH. *The Visual Object of Desire in Late Medieval England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008.

WIRTH, JEAN. *L'Image médiévale. Naissance et développements (VIe-XVe)*. Paris: Méridiens-Klincksieck, 1989.